

# FIREWEED

Poetry of Western Oregon



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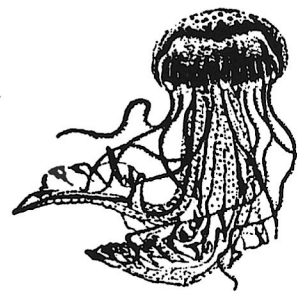
***FIREWEED: POETRY OF WESTERN OREGON*** is published quarterly in October, January, April and July. *FIREWEED* publishes poets living in the western half of Oregon, though poems need not be regional in subject. Manuscripts should include a return envelope with sufficient postage. We also need a biographical note. Inquiries about submission of reviews or essays are welcome. Subscriptions are \$10 for four issues. All contents are copyrighted 1993 by *FIREWEED*, 1330 E. 25th Ave., Eugene, OR 97403.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Carlos Reyes	NOTICING	/ 5
Alice Evans	VIGIL AT ODELL LAKE	/ 8
Libré Cory	THE SISKIYOU MOUNTAINS	/ 9
Stephen R. Jones	AN UNDERGROUND RIVER	/ 10
Robert Cohen	POEM FOR RON	/ 11
Virginia Corrie-Cozart	OLD FAHY PLACE	/ 12
	RETURN TO COOS COUNTY	/ 13
T. L. Seckler	WINDOWS	/ 14
Barbara Thomas	UNOPENED GIFTS	/ 15
Michele Thompson	WINTER FIRES	/ 16
Melanie Ann Holen	THE MATING MUST TAKE PLACE IN THE AIR	/ 17
Jane Glazer	SAP RISE	/ 18
Gary L. Lark	INTERLUDE IN THE FABRIC STORE	/ 19
Jenny Fowler	FOURTEENTH STREET	/ 20
	NOT VACANT	/ 20
Chuck McHenry	ON THE HILL ABOVE OUR HOUSE	/ 21
W. D. Snodgrass	HEART'S NEEDLE, Section 2 (GUEST POEM)	/ 22
Carlos Reyes	COMMENT	/ 23
Susan Spady	THE LIGHT TABLE	/ 25
Jane Glazer	SKATEBOARDERS	/ 26
Jane Bailey	NURSING A GRUDGE	/ 27
R. W. Jagodnik, Jr.	THE LEECH	/ 28
Bonnita Stahlberg	ECOPRENEURING	/ 29
Daryl Ackley	JED	/ 30

Clem Starck	FALLING OFF THE ROOF, I MISS THE FALLS CITY FOURTH OF JULY PARADE AND PICNIC	/ 31
C. A. Gilbert	MEMORY'S MIGRATION	/ 31
Larry Beckett	"I like it, yeah and it's okay if it's abstract;"	/ 32
H. M. Isleib	I SENSE A MAP	/ 33
Kenn Mitchell	SISTER LEO IN THE SHOWER	/ 34
Brian Ingram	DRYDEN'S GRIPE	/ 35
David Oates	LOST	/ 36
Ann Staley	REVIEW: SKY RIVER BY NAN HANNON	/ 37
C. A. Gilbert	BOOKFIND: TRAVELING THROUGH THE DARK BY WILLIAM STAFFORD	/ 39
Jackie Melvin	TESTIMONY: RAISED BY BOOKS	/ 40
	EDITORS' NOTES	/ 42
	CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES	/ 42



Carlos Reyes

NOTICING

I.

...the flash of emerald green  
in the black feathers of the magpie

(I'd not noticed in central Washington  
or Ireland...)

I've seen many of those feathers  
thought them only black,

on what an Irish poet has called  
"half a white crow"

II.

I walk, finding game trails,  
noticing deer tracks, grainy mounds  
of harvester ant hills, piles of pellets

as I make my short cut through the desert  
on my way home

...the brittle, rent and broken sagebrush  
that asks to be twisted more;

fading tracks of tires in the sand

the detritus

a spot of snow left in the shade,  
its imitation twin a piece  
of styrofoam nearby



a piston rusting, no, two  
from some great engine failed

Was this our civilization?

III.

Every day as I walk this way, noticing  
each discard, each rusted pop bottle lid,  
each aluminum can more familiar...

Do people hold the desert  
in such disregard? the wind  
should whisper

IV.

Last week snow left moisture  
to feed bunch grass and bitterbrush  
and rot perhaps newsprint fragments

The setting sun, even in winter, tries  
to fade the artificial color  
of printed scraps  
pushed along by the wind  
as it sweeps its sandy floor

Suppose the desert is everyone's dump,  
dumping ground,  
a mess by us for nature to clean up?

The popping jack rabbit runs from the issue  
zig-zagging to the east

V.

The mule deer that gathered  
around the tall Great American sage  
this misty morning  
have disappeared

VI.

In the cerulean blue  
six miles above the desert

no cloud but ozone threatening gas and heat  
vapor trail of a jet  
whose passengers see nothing below  
but *earth tones*

earth brown

nothing more--

What lives down there on the desert  
they ask each other over cocktails

What could live down there?

I remember a time when flying over arctic ice  
looking down on all that white  
I asked myself the same question

Alice Evans

VIGIL AT ODELL LAKE

The surface of the lake is almost frozen.  
I can hear the ice crack as it expands.

A sound like spring peepers  
or a small woodland bird  
pings along the edges of the shoreline  
where I stand.

I'm here at the beginning again, a new year.  
This time, will I take what comes my way?

Grebes kick & dive in water still open.  
Snow is falling fast, faster.  
The mountains on the other side  
have all but disappeared.

A bald eagle flies in low above my head,  
settles far out on the ice,  
a dark post, sentry to my fading vision.

I raise my field glasses,  
focus on the eagle shuffling back & forth,  
tilting its head, listening and watching,  
like me, a solitary dancer.

I notice my own incessant movement.  
One foot up, then down, now right, now left.

The bird's just trying to keep warm, perhaps.  
Or looking to spear the one fat trout  
that swims beneath a thin surface.

Libré Cory

THE SISKIYOU MOUNTAINS

If it wasn't  
January,  
I might be out on  
that high bright  
burning ridge  
of crimson peridotite,  
walking fast and  
breathing deep.

If it wasn't  
2 a.m.,  
I might be waking  
to the bitter blue  
sweet breath  
of a mountain morning.  
I might wake and  
walk into  
all that possibility:  
purple iris  
catching the light,  
hummingbirds among  
the firs.

If it was  
June,  
I might have  
my winter dreams  
under my feet,  
reminding me  
that I am what I  
think I am  
all of these long January  
nights  
of doubt  
when I think  
that  
I will never  
feel  
so completely  
clear and calm  
again.

Stephen R. Jones

AN UNDERGROUND RIVER

How strange if you could follow your name back,  
hear the first person to utter, "Steve,"  
perhaps naming a child or himself.  
It would be like finding an underground river,  
following it back through lava tube and fault line.  
Rivers have no pinpoint source, rather they begin  
in proximity to an abundance of water--  
glacial melt or rainfall pool and gather  
for a run to the sea. Maybe my name gathered  
that way, crafted from a word for wooden "stave"  
by lanky river people, who became experts  
at finding apt names, inventing sound  
to follow people through wending lives.  
Living by a river teaches a way to listen  
so even our bones hear sound roll along in the water.  
Names carry this listening along with us.

Robert Cohen

POEM FOR RON

We comb the corners of our youth  
in photographs, alumni books,  
and most of all in memory  
as though the mind's eye really looks.

Under the guise of experience  
we calmly reconstruct our own worst fears,  
consigning them to history  
as though the only distances were years.

Yet everything is changed for good or ill.  
The arrogance of innocence is gone  
the way of all good riddance.  
I know that when I call you on the phone

the voice I hear is you, as you hear me.  
The fantasies and fictions never sold.  
We keep them now in closets  
where the memories breed mold.

And when we meet we greet as humans will,  
not glib or jaded, not profuse,  
but certain in an unsure way  
our friendship weathered the abuse

we heaped on it before we knew  
how much we care, how much we care.  
More important than our youth  
is what we learned from leaving there.

Virginia Corrie-Cozart

### OLD FAHY PLACE

I remember the Fahy place  
with its gingerbread and pickets  
and the brothers and sisters  
who stayed on after their parents died,  
faithful as geese.

Frank in black suit and vest  
walked five miles to town for Mass  
like a wise old crow  
going against traffic.  
Flo, corseted, bright-eyed,  
picked wild strawberries  
smaller than her thumbnail,  
preserved them to share at picnics.  
Molly with fly-away hair,  
fragile as a wing,  
could disappear before your eyes  
into the scratch pines behind their house.  
With one glass eye  
that made him cock his head,  
Charlie was the youngest and the first to die.  
He bequeathed ten dollars to me,  
an eight-year-old child.

Sure as a feather held in amber,  
they were our history lesson.  
They took their turns  
in our Protestant community,  
offering a summer meeting place.  
We kids would scout the wagon in the barn,  
the family Bible in the parlor,  
were told to look for the water wheel,  
first in the county,  
immobile with Himalaya blackberries.  
Like the great blue heron, seldom seen,  
but filling our dreams,  
the Fahys were present.  
I don't remember how they died,  
if I ever knew.  
We thought we'd always  
be able to see daylight  
through their woodshed roof,  
bring up iron water from their pump.

### RETURN TO COOS COUNTY

The Randolph Club picnic  
an old woman has a name I recognize.  
Louise, I call, finally locating  
in her walnut face  
the young pale-eyed woman I'd wanted to become.  
My grandsons are not consoled  
by hamburger casserole. They fuss, run off.  
When an unknown child cries Mama,  
I turn toward it.

Florence asks me what my mother  
is doing these days.  
Mom's been gone several years, I tell her.  
We're both confused.  
I mean, your mom up in Salem.  
That's me, I squeak.  
A stranger says, No, Florence,  
this is Lorrie's sister from back east.  
No no, I say,  
it's her mother, I'm her mother.  
The grandchildren return, wanting their parents.

Though I have no greeting for him,  
I go find my husband.  
Our story is still young,  
his children never falling into my lap.  
He never met his grandfather  
and can't find the child in me  
who carried the clothespin bag.  
I make familiar gestures,  
bake a cobbler, braid my hair.  
I get out clean towels  
that smell like the north wind.

Later when we lie down together,  
his body defines me  
the way the river measures the benchland.  
I pretend his arms are the Coos County hills,  
me, the Coquille Valley, tabula rasa,  
a line-dried sheet.



T. L. Seckler

### WINDOWS

Bent's post office glass is rippled and dust-streaked,  
Framed with dark, cracked wood,  
Upheld by sandy, sun-warmed adobes,  
Fronted by an ancient window box  
Filled with green and pink geraniums.  
Abuelita peers from inside her cool cavern,  
Shadowed and insulated from the afternoon heat.  
Approaching from outside,  
My face is overlaid on hers,  
Broad, brown-skinned, Indian bones and dark eyes  
Meshed with white, Dutch-blue irises and pinched nose.  
Her wrinkles are subtracted,  
My silver streaks increased.  
Locked in place, this portrait of she-me,  
Is etched upon the glass,  
Backed by the dirt logging road to Nogal Canyon  
And a green-yellow thunder cloud  
Building behind the juniper and pinon-spotted hills.  
I catch her looking out,  
As she catches me, looking in.

Barbara Thomas

### UNOPENED GIFTS

Once  
She might have been  
Long ago  
More than this dark mass  
Of crumpled gifts  
She cannot  
Let loose. She leans  
  
Against a wall  
That begins to tilt  
And slide-- then swings free  
Over oil stained water  
Where blind fish swim  
Belly up along the rim  
Of an empty sky.  
  
Her fingers grow stiff  
With unripened time,  
Unopened gifts-- while  
A sly snake  
Slithers free  
Leaving  
The original garden  
In tatters, her life  
Undone  
But outwardly serene.



Michele Thompson

WINTER FIRES

An unruly woman will open  
her umbrella in the snow  
for somewhere in mind she is  
to be, out of falling dormant

bathos, heating her faculties  
by bonfires of expansive beaches,  
singed bonnets and derbies;  
a woman burns under her canopy.

Melanie Ann Holen

THE MATING MUST TAKE PLACE  
IN THE AIR

The queen  
has one chance  
with the dozen drones  
one flight  
before the long  
honey-moon...  
The sun is bright  
that afternoon  
the hive is one  
in this union...  
with the one  
true female  
bee among them.  
Imagine flying  
while becoming  
alive.  
Imagine it's  
only once,  
so precious,  
so sweet,  
like raw  
honey,  
or a kind of  
sting.

Jane Glazer

SAP RISE

You come in from the garden  
smelling of fresh-turned earth  
and evening, the air of early spring  
still clinging to your skin.  
You come in hungry, having worked  
out there all afternoon, sniff  
around the stove, fidgety as a starling.  
First you say the fiddle ferns  
are bulging out, distended, that you  
stripped away old fronds to find  
them hiding under there like teenage  
boys comparing their erections.  
You tell me I would be amazed  
to see the new grape leaves today,  
a sudden fuzz on leggy vines,  
how their delicate edges, fluted  
as a vulva and as pink, reveal  
a little clitoris inside.

I move to put soup bowls on the table,  
push the white vase of camellias  
to the edge. You follow, take a tallow  
candle from the shelf, strike a match  
to light the wick. Eager to talk, you say  
the apple blossoms, too, are coming out,  
plump and rosy, going milky,  
protuberant as nursing nipples after  
being sucked, do I remember?  
Best of all, you found the rhubarb  
you'd forgotten all about, tell me  
how it thrusts up one stiff stalk,  
dead center, that looks-- you gesture--  
like some prehistoric penis, swollen  
on the tip, urgent as a mushroom.

Gary L. Lark

INTERLUDE IN THE FABRIC STORE

I come for buttons  
and velcro  
but her eyes pull me  
through the cotton and velour

over oceans of green velvet  
to her small graceful hands  
counting yards,  
sorting pins.

She allows lace  
to linger on her palms,  
measuring the distance  
between us.

Walking to the register  
she takes my offering,  
folding her springtime  
around it.

Will there be anything else?

Jenny Fowler

FOURTEENTH STREET

The house smells of bread  
--one loaf  
in the oven,  
the other rising  
on the woodstove.

Today it rained  
--I cast off my wet shoes  
and slipped between the wall  
and the stove  
to dry out.

I study my footprints melted  
into the black side, compare  
my feet to old gumrubber soles  
--I still fit here,  
in my child feet,  
child crouched,  
in my childhood house.

NOT VACANT

A calendar hangs frozen  
August in  
Oregon, my valley  
wrinkled river  
ditch drain  
sink across the hallway  
gas heater.  
Winter creeps in, cools  
white plaster walls  
older than the lovers kissing  
longer than the months  
I've been away.

Chuck McHenry

ON THE HILL  
ABOVE OUR HOUSE

Sit down. The wind bends your hair as  
it does the tall grass on this slope.  
Squint and you see the roof of  
your house below.  
Be overwhelmed with your troubles, or  
forget them.  
You may cry if you like, or laugh.  
No matter, my friend.  
You are alone up here today.  
Lie back and the sky tilts toward you.  
Play dead and buzzards will come.



## GUEST POEM

W. D. Snodgrass

Late April and you are three; today  
We dug your garden in the yard.  
To curb the damage of your play,  
Strange dogs at night and the moles tunneling,  
Four slender sticks of lath stand guard  
Uplifting their thin string.

So you were the first to tramp it down.  
And after the earth was sifted close  
You brought your watering can to drown  
All earth *and* us. But these mixed seeds are pressed  
With light loam in their steadfast rows.  
Child, we've done our best.

Someone will have to weed and spread  
The young sprouts. Sprinkle them in the hour  
When shadow falls across their bed.  
You should try to look at them every day  
Because when they come to full flower  
I will be away.

Section 2 of the title poem of *HEART'S NEEDLE*  
(Alfred A. Knopf, 1959); most recently  
published in *SELECTED POEMS 1957-1987*  
(Soho, 1987).

## COMMENT

In 1959 W. D. Snodgrass, who had recently won the Pulitzer Prize for *HEART'S NEEDLE*, came to Sylvan Karchmer's creative writing class at the University of Oregon and read selections from that volume. Snodgrass was the first poet I ever heard read his own poetry aloud. Though the class was mainly short story writing-- at the time I had aspirations of being a writer-- that reading had a lasting effect on me. When I began to write poetry seriously as an adult in 1964, the memory of that reading came back to me and, with it, the picture of what I think being a poet is all about. The image remains with me to the present day. I am unclear as to what direct influence Snodgrass has had on my poetry writing, as our writing is not at all alike.

Another link came in the person of the poet Walter Hall, student and friend of Snodgrass, who came to Oregon from Detroit in the early 1970's. Walter and I became fast friends and remained so until his untimely death in Eugene a few years back. Walter taught me a lot about poetry writing, much of what he must have learned from Snodgrass and passed along to me. It was not until 1984, on the occasion of a month-long visit to Yaddo, that I began to get acquainted-- through correspondence-- with Snodgrass.

I would like to quote one of the poems from the sequence "Heart's Needle." Originally, I thought to use the first poem in the suite because of its reference to the Korean War, but I decided not to because of its length, and chose instead the second poem. I am attracted to it because it brings me back to a spring day when I planted wildflowers with my three year old granddaughter, Phoebe... And, yes, I have daughters of my own: they, also left behind in the cataclysmic shifting in my own life... So I find the interaction between father and daughter in the poem particularly endearing and poignant, as I presume many other fathers would.

As this piece moves from digging up the yard, preparing the soil, planting the seeds in "steadfast rows," weeding, transplanting and watering, the poet takes us through the full range of his relationship with his daughter. We do what we can to protect and nurture our loved ones with "slender sticks of lath," but all too often it is the loved one who breaks through the fence and tramples down the garden. In the last line of the second stanza the poet states: "Child, we've done our best." With the planting of the flower garden we establish our love and trust. If we have indeed done our best, none of the storm winds of separation will destroy those bonds.



This wonderfully elaborated metaphor, of planting and tending a flower garden for the relationship of father and daughter, is completed with the lingering sadness suggested by the last lines of the poem: "You should try to look at them every day/Because when they come to full flower/I will be away." Those of us as parents who have been separated from our children by death, divorce or war keep such images in our hearts as we struggle through our shifting lives.

Call this brief piece comment (I wouldn't dare call it criticism) or a relating of poetic coincidences in the manner of Robert Duncan's "poetic disturbances." Or call it an appreciation. We are very fortunate to have in our midst poets like W. D. Snodgrass.

Carlos Reyes



Susan Spady

#### THE LIGHT TABLE

Dreams roam the ceilings of this house,  
rooms billow and empty with the breath  
of sleepers. But at your door  
a glow seeps out. I knock

and enter: my daughter, why aren't you  
sleeping? You glare, sip your quart  
of cold coffee, your face illumined  
by the light table. On backlit pages

you adjust columns, captions, break up  
butting headlines, fill awkward  
silences. Weed out all the flaws.  
When the *Clarton* hits the masses

the errors won't be yours, but the  
sleepers', the ones who won't make editor  
next year, who praise you for precision,  
dependability, a jolly laugh.

I ask you tenderly, I think, if this  
might be too much-- calculus, humanities,  
three a.m. *Scholarship*, you snarl,  
which translates, *East Coast*.  
I hang my head, gazing

at the light box, wan yellow glow  
which bushels now with dandelions--  
their rays bitten like your nails--  
watch ragged suns explode  
to white globes. Ten years ago

you ran with crazy laughter,  
grasping bald stems in your fist  
while behind you, their silks loosened  
in a blank sky, their frothy pestilence  
found my garden. *Enjoy your life*,

I want to say, not knowing how,  
for I'd weed until my hands were black  
and still do-- until my back hitches,  
vengeful, to itself, a huge claw  
bent on perfect rows.



Jane Glazer

### SKATEBOARDERS

No shirts, no promises,  
just shoes and shorts,  
shaved hair to cut down air's resistance,  
arms  
outstretched  
against the huge imbalance,  
they push one foot to speed the other,  
pick up momentum for their boards,  
their only shields: a dream,  
a red bandanna.

They rock across  
the underpinning trucks,  
toes and heels feel the grip, the twist,  
attack  
the improbable parabola  
against the wall  
so they can fly into the cement block,  
get off the wall alive  
without a fall,  
and get to kick  
against the pavement one more try.

They are thinner  
than the boards they ride,  
their lives  
a line between  
the dreamed-of and the probable.

Jane Bailey

### NURSING A GRUDGE

Imagine him here in this ICU bed, artificial airwaves broadcasting his fear onto a bile-green screen, jumping as he catches his breath, then blipping little irritations out to the nurses station, where decisions are made based on six-second strips of attention.

I am his nurse, and this my eighth twelve-hour shift without a night off, and Mildred, my neighbor, decided to build her fence today while I dreamed I was a prisoner of war in a Vietnam movie, even though I never slept, and my husband expected dinner like clockwork, then fell asleep during the final spin of The Wheel of Fortune, while I was washing the dishes.

My feet hurt, even wearing support hose that could stand on their own, and it took me twenty minutes to find a parking space, even though the hospital spent ten million dollars on a new parking structure that I have to stoop down to drive in because the antenna beats against the overhead beams, and now they've turned the whole first floor into visitors parking.

I was late to hear the shift report, and they already made assignments, and I missed all but one patient's story, and it wasn't my patient, so I was a little testy anyway, and then I had to get report from the day nurse with the horsy face, who never wants to go home because her husband treats her like a house slave but the doctors treat her like a love slave, so she talks and talks until I pick up the chart and walk away.

I wasn't even listening, figuring I'd just get the story from the chart, because I hate the way she sounds so perfect and takes credit for things the night nurse reported, as though she personally ordered the new medication and not the doctor, who doesn't listen to the night nurse, in fact has never even met her, but thinks she's cute and accuses her of sleeping with the respiratory therapist whose deodorant doesn't work, the one who stinks up the halls with cheap cologne.

I didn't even hear when she said the patient's name, and I don't recognize him under the green plastic bubble strapped like a clamshell to his face, and I'm in a foul mood, and he's already leaning into his call light, ringing his buzzer and calling the nurses, some of them my friends, hey goodlookin' honey sweet thing how come you're not married.

Just imagine me walking into his room in my sturdy white shoes with the bleeding hearts on the heels.

R. W. Jagodnik, Jr.

## THE LEECH

for Allen Widerburg

There, three more dead (you remember) decomposing  
like three ground-hogs toppled over in last Spring's meadow  
(like yesterday)-- memories yellowing the film age allows.

Prodding their bellies with your pen will not arrest  
the maggot's feast-- those celebrating Spring or some  
rainy season gorge themselves in the wiggle of the dead.

However, by some magic spell, those three dead breathe  
again for me, alive in their corpses; you did this, stirring  
the muck left by Da Nang in the cauldron of your mind.

(start with) black eye-lids crusted shut with mud (mixed with)  
chest-wounds coagulated closed (a pinch of) arms without hands  
(topped with) dog-tag chains dangling between eye teeth.

You resurrected these three dead Marines like the sorcerer  
you are and wrote them to me like I would know what to do with  
them; I latched on and sucked them dead again.

I reveled in the blood spilt through their wounds,  
like the leech I am, draining sorrow from the dead.

Bonnie Stahlberg

## ECOPRENEURING

California's Adopt-A-Highway program was surely born  
after Stafford spoke of "starting with little things."  
Blue signs east of Redding label Litter Control  
every three scenic miles: libraries, schools, entire  
towns adopt the same road as Buzzard's Glory RV Park.  
The Modified Motorcycle Association picks up after  
the Sutter Family; Beyond War follows a local VFW post.

Impressive idea for the planet-positive: litter-free  
co-existence; intangible fringe benefits. Someone just  
transplanted the green idea to Oregon, and I'm ready to  
adopt three miles of Ponderosa pine on any stretch from  
Black Butte to Sisters. Maybe take on the McKenzie Pass.

Riskier yet: commit to a difficult highway, one of those  
hard-to-adopt cases like an interstate separating connected  
hearts. Of course main arteries are either backlogged  
or under permanent construction; the road kill can be heavy;  
trace scars and stains won't be hosed away. Not to worry:  
some recycling of debris occurs. Picking up the litter is  
small stuff, but it's a start; maintenance is full-time work.

Daryl Ackley

JED

Up the path you stomp with cane,  
stubborn, searching  
creekgrass once  
ravaged by your spade.  
Your shack's a museum at the edge  
of smooth pavement  
where pale cars sail  
to redwood decked houses  
that shade the slow waters  
of the dirty stream  
that by right of claim--  
slagpiles, clumps of spikes  
& gears rusting in tall grass  
on the bank--  
should bear your name.

A daily procession of neighbors snaps pictures  
of your long beard brown from chew  
as you hunch at the side  
of the old burro  
but I'm here to talk of benefits  
& listen to your tales--  
the ambulance trip,  
the unforgiving diet, the heart,  
weakened by soft living,  
the time you lay  
three days on the cabin floor  
& no one came.

Clem Starck

FALLING OFF THE ROOF, I MISS  
THE FALLS CITY FOURTH OF JULY  
PARADE AND PICNIC

X-rays negative, I limp across the parking lot.  
Driving home I remember my father telling  
how my grandfather used to make a patriotic speech  
to his congregation  
every year on the Fourth.  
Later I learn that my elder daughter  
came in second in the sack race.

C. A. Gilbert

MEMORY'S MIGRATION

"Hey Grandpa!"  
I yelled, "looks like the geese  
are flying south for the winter."

Earl Porter, the man who gave  
Baby-Faced Nelson a ride, veteran  
fisherman, father of Mary Elizabeth,  
James and Riley, husband of Ida, master  
gardener, teller of squirrel jokes, square  
dancer, and friend of Mr. Turner, wore  
string ties fashionably.

He stands with Ida in a hop field  
in a picture framed on my wall,  
staring back at me, then up  
into the fall sky, following  
the wavering vee, says  
"Looks like it."



Larry Beckett

I like it, yeah and it's okay if it's abstract;  
look at the printmakers of the floating world  
who made posters of nothing, of what, whores  
in vague color, and actors in masks, all shape;  
and what about the old masters, with their lights  
and darks, their dear madonnas and life drawings,  
who worked so hard, in a brave art, and smeared  
canvas because they saw the gospel of surface?  
Out beyond the Bay Bridge, the sun bangs flat  
on the ambiguous water, and pretty quick now  
the simple heaven will be flamboyant with stars;  
oh I'm real glad you're back in your studio  
full of San Francisco light, with the purple dots  
and green stripes flowering under your fat brush.

H. M. Isleib

#### I SENSE A MAP

Just out of the dull stamp of everyday I sense a map.  
Below me and above me is the same foreign place; birds  
and worms are lovers rushing to each other at the point  
where I live. Underneath me, the worms are making dirt  
out of death, unsettling the soil so that seeds can  
breathe. Above me, doves and robins flock away from  
each other, toward worms and seeds, the turning of  
cycles I don't know. The surface is my life. It explains  
everything. The woman at the laundromat who tells  
me that the vending machine isn't supposed to be out  
of order. The large man at the convenience store who  
says that kids are making his mind go. The joggers that  
go by, tracing their escape through neighborhoods full  
of lives I almost know. This is what it is like. Why the  
law of gravity is our most important tool. Without  
gravity, we might already be gone, floating out high  
enough to glimpse the layout of things. All the paths  
would become obvious. We might never return. Not  
even in the wake of doves and robins.

Kenn Mitchell

SISTER LEO IN THE SHOWER

sister leo in the shower  
sees the face of jesus

cannot discern between  
fractional mathematics & magic

no concern for material gains  
she is as a bird in the rain

alive for the simple joys of flight  
in the loving arms of jesus

almost a sparrow  
waiting for manna from heaven

Brian Ingram

DRYDEN'S GRIPE

Just shut the door  
Let me think alone  
My wit is spent  
The world forgets  
What I know

I'm out of depth  
Tragedy makes me laugh  
The details cut their little paths  
And maggots are warmed by the sun

There is a crisis of confidence  
A sinking into the new  
Each day the colors fade  
From my garden  
And I am a part  
Of how memory  
Is made into dust



David Oates

LOST

like a tired, tired swimmer  
farthest out to sea

I can no longer tell my  
strength from my weakness

that's how I know--  
*finally, well and truly lost*

just like they always said

or maybe  
my left hand pacing my right

and my lungs, like desire and duty,  
filling in tandem

*found*  
the place out there

far, far  
and farther yet

where the tips of two straight lines  
touch



REVIEW: *SKY RIVER* by Nan Hannon (Ahsahta Press, 1991)

*SKY RIVER* by Ashland poet Nan Hannon was a finalist for the OILA Poetry award in 1992. This fine, slim blue volume from Ahsahta Press certainly deserves a wider readership than it has received thus far, and for both reasons *FIREWEED* is taking this opportunity to review it.

In a fast-paced, fragmented, mobile world, in a world where there is too much motion, *SKY RIVER* is a book which celebrates place, community, work, and the love that is made visible when the three come together. Ms. Hannon is a social scientist who is also the curator of the Swedenburg Cultural Center in Ashland and a fine poet. She has crafted in this volume, thirty poems of tribute, her loving and exacting eye cast upon field work, mapping, research, graves and mounds; also upon agate hunters, siblings, wives and widows, winter.

Traversing places we know-- the Coquille River, Siletz, Gold Beach, Land's End-- and those we do not-- Petroglyph Lake, Site 35AJ1, New Grange Mound-- Ms. Hannon's eloquent poems invite the reader into the world where the scientist and the poet speak with one voice. It is a world of stillness, stones, of beauty lost and recovered, of ground which "holds promise," of summer storms.

From "Mapping the Philpot Site, Coquille River," the flood tide salt water rushes in as "stake by stake the site disappears," until above the tides we see the artifacts eroding from the bank-- "jaspar, jade and sard" and a "tangled point" which shines, "heart of the past, fragile, enduring." In this poem, indeed for the length of this book, we are asked again and again to consider history, the history of place, the histories of the people who lived here before us. This poem ends, too, with a theme ever present in Part I, "Field Work": "God, give us work that outlasts us."

Later poems record scientists at work: "Twelve hours into the forest" and "Through the winter of hard rains/he camps on the floodplain." And, "it waited long for your eye/your hand" and "Long after dark, the bell-blows of your hammerstone still echo in the yard." All poems in this section echo with a zen line from the book's title poem, "Each path is practice."

This view of work-as-practice is perhaps most fully realized in "Advice to an Archaeologist" where the surety of the poet's voice sounds in lines like these:

Take as totem  
the ground squirrel...

Go to earth.  
Go underground. Out of the sun.  
Be the grey digger  
friend of the hidden.  
Earth turner.

Shake off strength.  
Be soft. Small.  
Easily hurt.  
Alert to the hunger of others.

Not on the syllabus in Archaeology 101, this is what is needed and what happens when work is a "practice," a path, a transforming action.

Finally, the poem "Suggested Research" is one of those fine little maps for getting through a life, any life, no matter the practice: "Count tangled arrowheads," Hannon writes, and ask, "Can these points still kill?" "Map strata," and ask "How thick is a life?" "Sift Mazama ash" or sleep in "This house-pit scar." Each thing you do, when life is practice, will suggest questions, will suggest ways of seeing, will offer up its own beauty.

In Part II, "The Brute Weight of Beauty," poems shine like the agates we gather on a beach walk:

We search in that last light,  
the last light of the last day,  
for the stones to take home,  
stones that admit light."

In "Siletz Meditation" and "Beauty" the light is mystical, spiritual; in "Jennie Wong" the light is of a small ghost "in dark houses and deserted streets." A resinous scent and an old road in West Texas form the question of "Dove Season"; morels, in "Widow." And, finally, poems of hard and bitter beauty, the first wife's quilt, the flour sacks soaked by kerosene, Pysanky eggs crushed in a husband's rage. These last poems are haunted by light and by questions.

If you're travelling this summer, looking at stones, considering storms crossing the mountains from the west; if you're looking into the night sky of "Sky River"; if you know the past is "fragile and enduring," these poems will speak to you.

A.S.



BOOKFIND: *TRAVELING THROUGH THE DARK*  
BY WILLIAM STAFFORD

There is something about the possibility of discovery in our daily lives that sustains us: the layering of events perceived as coincidence, which, upon examination, we attribute to a powerful truth we practice to find.

*When I face north a lost Cree*

And so it was that afternoon, one of those work days that demanded a break from ritual and a spot of ice cream. Black Tiger soothed the day's distortions and upped the ante. Leaving the worn brick walls and creamy concoctions behind Puckler's counters, I walked down Willamette to Smith Family Bookstore.

*It will be a long trip; he will be a new chief*

Fifteen minutes browsing upstairs from Delbert's barely dented my wallet and provided a birthday gift for a friend, along with an interesting back issue of *HUBBUB*, and a copy of Mark Halperin's *A PLACE MADE FAST*.

*under little dark trees he is to find a path  
we both must travel because we have met*

The day was looking up. I strolled back, past the Hult Center, and timed the traffic on 7th, dodging cars and legging its width against the light's wishes. From 8th Street, I could see my office building, where duties awaited. Blame it on the ice cream (have you tried Black Tiger?), but I executed a ninety degree turn east, towards the doors of The Book Bin, recently installed in the Tiffany Building.

*Henceforth we gesture even by waiting*

Careening past J. Sprat's Deli and the smell of coffee and chocolates at Fenton & Lee's, I catapulted down the stairs to the Poetry Section. Reference, filled with substantial volumes, stood dully nearby. Ample fodder for a different meal, they could hardly pretend to know my mounting excitement as I scanned the poetry titles.

*And start a new vision: the rest of his life*

Poetry... the real stuff. Fire and ice cascading off the page into my veins. Within five minutes, I held it gingerly in my hands.



Here it was, at last. My very own copy of William Stafford's *TRAVELING THROUGH THE DARK* (Harper and Row, 1962). The lines I've quoted are excerpts from "Returned to Say," one of my favorite poems in this celebrated book.

There are 75 other reasons to investigate this book. The book's title poem, about encountering a roadkill deer with an unborn fawn, considers death and the blameless choices thrust our way, nevertheless to be made before we go on. It is the lead poem and set standards for a following generation of poets. Some other favorites are: "The Tillamook Burn," "Before the Big Storm," "Fall Journey," "A Dedication," "Chickens the Weasel Killed," "Requiem," and "Love the Butcher Bird Lurks Everywhere."

*TRAVELING THROUGH THE DARK* was the National Book Award Winner in 1963. It firmly recognized and established William Stafford as a major talent. Finding this particular issue for my library validates the search for out of print book treasures. I enjoy Stafford's delightful sense of "adventuring into the language." His understanding of the value of discovery is evident in the poetry:

*We will mean what he does. Back of this page  
the path turns north. We are looking for a sign.  
Our moccasins do not mark the ground.*

C. A. Gilbert



#### TESTIMONY: RAISED BY BOOKS

"If you could eat books and wear books and make furniture out of books, you'd be in good shape," my mother says. She can't believe that I've spent the little money I have to move boxes and boxes of books again. "You must have a *thousand* of them." It's a number she's using as an exclamation, as a synonym for "absurd." I don't have the nerve to tell her that her metaphor is a low-shot. I have almost two thousand books. I counted them the day I was trying to discover whether I was proud or a little nervous that I had started to double-shelve and still had books following me everywhere.

I sat down that day and asked myself what this book love was all about, and I found a truth I will probably never speak of to my mother. I learned that I was raised not by my parents, but by books. My house, I see now, is full of my chosen family.

My sister had my mother in a clutch from the beginning. My father only cared for himself. But my mother read to us every night. She brings it up to me now as a defense against what she calls my "psychologizing." "I came home from work every night and read to you two kids, even when it was the *last* thing I felt like doing."

Every night. Hello words. Here comes my friend the book again. Come a little closer. Let me hold you. OK, now, you hold me. I love the bodies of books. I buy books that are beautifully made just to hold them in my hands. I rescue them from dusty boxes at estate sales. I give them a home, in return for my life.

When I'm told that I'm a little distant, that I don't know people well, I say, well, I was raised by books. People *are* dim images sometimes. My mother, over there, somewhere, stuck to my sister. My father always off, anywhere. When there were no other arms for me, I moved in with words.

Sometimes I'm almost glad about this. It could have been worse. I filled some of the early emptiness with the faithfulness of the language. It was an outrageous playground.

In the third grade, when we learned to make regular patterns of loops and lines, I fell in love with the other side-- the making of words and the making of meaning. I built up that callous on my middle finger, right hand, and it was in every way proud flesh, a medal I was earning in a quiet war.

I've never stopped writing, and I work now as an editor. I find surprise and company in almost any scrap of print. The letters of the alphabet please me. Punctuation can make me laugh. I can get involved with some head-of-a-pin black mark that most people, brought up with people, would brush away. And when I'm working, I ask every author: Can you make me a soul from this heap of sound?

Patterns in ink are the paths I know how to travel. I agree, I can be vague out in the wider world. But I made it, didn't I? I didn't die back then, and I could have. Instead of dying, I read. And I am full of layered, carefully scribed attention. I know the difference between *a* and *the*, the immense difference between a breath coming here or there.

Isn't that also love?

Jackie Melvin





## EDITORS' NOTES

*FIREWEED* has been a better magazine because Ann Popple Muller has proofed all but the first and the current issues. Thank you for your accurate eye and your contribution of energy.

With this issue we introduce a new occasional feature: the personal essay. We are calling this feature TESTIMONY. This is writing about the writing and reading of poetry. Or about the teaching of the writing of poetry. Or even about poets themselves (memoirs). This is a space we have opened up in our format for readers to fill if they care to do so. Opinions about poetry are welcome. "Raised By Books" by Jackie Melvin in this issue is an excellent example of what we had in mind. Send us your examples for consideration.

ATTENTION PLEASE!!! Join us for the Fourth Annual *FIREWEED* Potluck Picnic and Reading. This year we will gather on Sept. 19th, noon to 5 pm, at Willamette Park, just south of Corvallis on 99W. Bring your own service and a salad, dessert, or main dish. *FIREWEED* provides non-alcoholic beverages. Poets may read two or three pieces.

Directions: 1/2 mile south of Corvallis on 99W, turn east at the Water Treatment Plant sign onto Goodnight Rd. Go straight head into the park, 8 blocks down. Hope to see you there!



## CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

Daryl Ackley, Eagle Point, hikes and gardens near Butte Falls. He has won several OSPA awards.

Jane Bailey, Salem, is a nurse part-time but mainly a poet.

\* Larry Beckett, Portland, has work in *PACIFIC REVIEW*, *WILLIAM AND MARY REVIEW*, and *POET LORE*.

Robert Cohen, Portland, has poems in *PORTLAND REVIEW*, *PAINTED HILLS REVIEW* and *PORTLANDER*. He regularly attends the Coos Head Writers Workshop.

Virginia Corrie-Cozart, Salem, has poems forthcoming in *HUBBUB* and *KARAMU*. Virginia, Lois Rosen and Carolyn Miller read their work in Eugene last winter.

\* Libré Cory, Talent, is a mediator with a lawyer's training and experience. She is an enthusiastic backpacker.

Alice Evans, Eugene, teaches writing and writes in many genres. Her interviews of poets have appeared in *POETS & WRITERS* and *WHAT'S HAPPENING*.

Jenny Fowler, Philomath, starts at OSU this fall. She spent part of a high school year in Germany.

C. A. Gilbert, Springfield, is a financial planner. His new chapbook is *PORTAGE*.

Jane Glazer, Portland, has a collection, *SOME TRICK OF LIGHT*, forthcoming from Adrienne Lee Press. Recent work appears in *THE ANTIOCH REVIEW*.

Melanie Ann Holen, Medford, learned about beekeeping from her father. She has appeared before in *FIREWEED*.

Brian Ingram, Portland, majored in literature at PSU. He works in an auto parts warehouse and keeps a close eye on today's poetry.

\* H. M. Isleib, Portland, found *FIREWEED* at Conant and Conant Booksellers. H. M. studied religion at Lewis and Clark and took classes from Vern Rutsala and Maxine Scates.

\* R. W. Jagodnik, Jr., Estacada, is a poet who has studied with Allen Widerburg.

Stephen R. Jones, Corvallis, teaches college writing at Sprague High School. His poems have appeared in *NORTHWEST REVIEW* and *CALAPOOYA COLLAGE*.

Gary L. Lark, North Bend, works as outreach librarian in Coos County. He is a storyteller who presents throughout the Coos Bay area.

\* Jackie Melvin, Eugene, is an essayist and poet, with professional editing experience. She read "Raised by Books" this spring at "The Silent Child" reading at Maude Kerns Art Center.

\* Kenn Mitchell, Eugene, has had fourteen magazine acceptances since late 1991. For the past twenty years he has worked in small

sawmills and veneer mills.

\* Chuck McHenry, Eugene, has his first publication in *FIREWEED*.

\* David Oates, Eugene, has two books: *PEACE IN EXILE*, poetry from Oyster River Press, and *EARTH RISING*, a study of environmentalism from OSU press.

Carlos Reyes, Portland, helped found *HUBBUB*. His poems are widely published. His recent collection is *NIGHTMARKS*.

T. L. Seckler, Eugene, a transplant from the Southwest, writes poetry, fiction and magazine articles.

Susan Spady, Philomath, thumbs through "old *FIREWEEDS*, enjoying them over again." *MOTHER STREET* is her book length manuscript, presently being considered by Texas Tech University Press.

\* Bonnita Stahlberg, Eugene, had a poem in the November 1992 *Ms*. She teaches English and Speech at South Eugene High School.

Clem Starck, Dallas, has taught poetry writing at Willamette University. His collection *JOURNEYMAN'S WAGES* is due out from StoryLine Press.

Barbara Thomas, Portland, read at the *FIREWEED/MOTES* collaboration at Conant & Conant Booksellers. Her poems have appeared in *MOTES*.

Michele Thompson, Corvallis, studies at the Bennington Writing Workshop this summer. Her poetry received an OSU award in 1992.

\* first appearance in *FIREWEED*

